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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 000467

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SA/FO AMBASSADOR QUINN, S/CT, SA/A
NSC FOR AHARRIMAN, KAMEND
CENTCOM FOR POLAD, CG CFA-A, CG CJTF-76
USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG

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SUBJECT: THE AFGHAN TWILIGHT ZONE: PROPOSAL FOR A NEW PRIME MINISTER?

Classified By: AMBASSADOR RONALD NEUMANN FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Several well-known members of Parliament (MPs), including Qanooni, Rabbani, and Fahim, have allegedly begun discussing the creation of the position of Prime Minister. The proposal has not yet been brought to the floor of the Parliament and the MPs' motives are still unclear, but it is likely that they stem from a desire to weaken the power of the President and/or create a more "controllable" office within the hierarchy of Afghan government. PolOffs cautioned their informant that such a radical change to the government's structure would require major constitutional revisions and would likely be seen by the majority of the Afghan populace as a Tajik versus Pashtun offensive. Post sees nothing good coming from a drastic change in the structure of the GOA so early in the life of its new Parliament, and will argue with contacts that this proposal should not go beyond the private discussion stage. We will pass to Speaker Qanooni Ambassador Neumann's clear opposition to the idea. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) In a typically bizarre example of the unpredictability of Afghan politics, well-known political contact Zaid Haidary (protect) met with PolOffs on February 2 to inform us of conversations among top MPs regarding a proposal to institute a new Prime Minister's office within the current structure of the GOA. Haidary had referred to similar rumblings during a previous meeting in late January, but it was the first time that he had mentioned specifics about the plan. The main instigators, he explained, were Yunus Qanooni, Marshal Fahim, ex-President Rabbani, and Wolesi Jirga MP Sayed Mansur Nadiri (an ex-mujahadeen commander from Baghlan), all of whom plan to meet in the next week to discuss the idea further. If agreed, they would call for a Loya Jirga in Kabul and institute the Prime Minister as an administrative leader and "political partner" to President Karzai.

13. (C) Upon hearing that the Prime Minister proposal was progressing more seriously than had previously been explained, PolOffs pointed out that adding a new Prime Minister to the current government would represent a major structural change in the GOA. International donors were unlikely to go along with such a proposal, given the resources that have been put into developing the current structure, and with only one month of legislative experience under its belt (much of it taken up by the Eid recess), Parliament has yet to pass any major legislation, and no one has had time to determine how well the current structure operates in Afghanistan. PolOffs noted that calling for a Loya Jirga at this early state would throw the country into political and administrative chaos, and might be regarded (particularly by Karzai) as an attempted coup d'etat.

14. (C) While Haidary was unclear on the MPs' motives for the Prime Minister proposal, he discussed with PolOffs the possibility that the MPs were simply trying to weaken President Karzai's leadership, either by dividing his constitutional powers between his current office and a new Prime Minister's, or by adding a new leadership position with the GOA into which they (Qanooni, Rabbani, and Mansur) could place someone more "controllable" than Hamed Karzai. PolOff predicted that any move to institute the new office would be seen by the Afghan populace as a Tajik-based offensive against Karzai's Pashtun-majority leadership. After much gnashing of teeth, Haidary agreed that the idea should be postponed for at least a year and said he would let PolOffs know of any further developments by the primary players.

COMMENT

15. (C) As difficult as it may be to believe that Qanooni, Rabbani, Fahim, and Mansur may be plotting to change the Constitution so early in the game, Zaid Haidary's credentials as a political contact are impeccable. He is a man with indisputable access to the main players, as well as to the majority of Afghan leadership. Upper level politicians, including a wide variety of MPs, routinely gather for social events in his home.

16. (C) Unlike the previous meeting, Haidary seemed to want to use the February 2 get-together to gain a sense of how the USG would react to the proposal so that he could pass this information along to his colleagues. PolOffs were explicit in expressing their doubts about the wisdom of the proposal. As with most new suggestions by Afghan politicians, this one is likely rooted in either: (a) a desire for personal gain or position; (b) a desire for revenge against an enemy - in this case, the man who beat them all in the 2004 Presidential election, Hamed Karzai; or (c) a pure and simple grab for even more power by players who will never be satisfied with what they already have.

17. (C) Given Qanooni's current leadership position, it is less clear what he would have to gain from such a proposal than the other players. If Haidary's account is credible, however, it is highly unlikely that any of these players are basing their proposal on a patriotic desire to improve governance in Afghanistan. Embassy will make known our firm opposition to this idea.

NEUMANN